

Sermon Outline.

SOME DOWNWARD TENDENCIES.

MK. VIII, 35-37.

INTRODUCTION.

Mr. Guizot in his lectures on civilization shows that civilization has two elements; the progress of the individual and the progress of society. The history of civilization shows that these two go together. They are mutually dependent. There is no real progress without the progress of the individual; and there is no rapid progress of the individual, without that of society. The process of civilization will be complete when the perfected individual lives in the perfected society.

I. *The law of development.*

1. The individual has a threefold being—a body, a soul, and a spirit. Now the individual cannot reach an ideal development without the simultaneous and harmonious progress of his whole nature. The whole man must perform the functions for which he was created.

2. That which is subordinate by nature must be kept subordinate; and that which is highest must rule. The body is the home and instrument of the spirit. And life is the time given for the discipline of the spirit.

3. Life is a gift. It is a gift that we may keep or lose, as we choose. God respects our freedom in all his gifts. (1) It is kept by using lawfully and benevolently. That is by using it in some lawful work, the product of which is a good—something that is good for the individual and for society. Such a use of our powers that we can say "I get no harm by it, and no one can be harmed by following my example." "The fruit of my labor is a good; and I, my family, my neighbor, and the world is the better for my work." Here is included labor for the support and comfort of the family. Also labor and money spent for the material improvement of the city or country, for education, for good government, and for moral and religious training. Any labor that is keeping me in moral rectitude and at the same time making it easier for others to live a true life. A life put to such use cannot be lost.

(2.) It is lost by using it unlawfully and selfishly. That is by devoting it to purposes of self gratification without reference to the law of love. When one puts his life to a use that ruins his character, or lessens his chances for a true and high moral life; or puts a stumbling block in the way of others, loses it. Such are responsible for their own life and all its consequences—for the good it was capable of doing and for the ruin it has wrought.

II. *Some downward tendencies.*—

1. The craze for pleasure: Paul said, in the last times men would be lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. If he should rise from the dead now he would find his prophecy fulfilled. Money and pleasure constitute the sum of modern life. Righteousness and duty are obsolete terms. The rage is to gratify the senses and the passions. Money is loved for its power of getting the things of sense.

(1) We condemn the gladiatorial contests of Greece; and the circus of Rome. We congratulate ourselves that we are not barbarians.

(2) We denounce the barbarity of our Anglo-Saxon sires for their cock-fights, and Catholic Spain for its bull-bating. (3) But how about our own practices. Our money, our time, our energies and too often our characters are lost in what we think the sports of a higher civilization: cards, billiards, the ball, the theater, the horse, yacht and bicycle races, base-ball and football, etc. I am not saying that these things are necessarily bad, that they are evil in themselves, or that they are as barbarous as cock-fighting or bull-bating. There can be no objection to games for recreation, or to athletics for physical development and health. What I condemn is the rage for and absorption in these things. Here is the test. Are the men and women that follow up such things the highest and purest types of character? Are they the characters to be counted upon in a moral reform? Some of them will give money to benevolence and to support the church. Some of them will dance all night for "charity." But will they give themselves in self-denying service for the good of others? Can the card-playing, theater-going and dancing

christian be counted on to bring sinners to Christ? Are they always found at the prayer meeting and around the Lord's table? When death calls do you want it to be while thus engaged?

Allowing that there may be some excuse for these things what defense can be made of the modern barbarism, the prize-fight? Behold the brutality of the late Sullivan and Corbett fight, and the later Corbett and Mitchel fight! Consider the character of the fighters! Look at the crowd gathered to satiate their lust by the sight of blood! Hear shouts of their fiendish joy that a brother is bruised and disgraced! Hear the jingle of blood money! See the open defiance of God and man! Study the connection between this and the saloon and the gambling hell! Can any man that loves God, home and native land long look with indifference upon such downward tendencies:

III. *Practical conclusions.*

1. Lessons from ancient Greece and Rome. So long as they were poor and struggling for existence there was little danger. They had their games and their sports but they were of a religious or patriotic character. The gladiatorial were to prepare men for the battle field. They were not simply physical feats. But as these civilizations grew old, the few grew wealthy and the many were made slaves. This wealth and luxury exempted the rich from the necessity of honorable labor. Their energies were then spent in gratifying their appetites and passions, made doubly strong by luxurious living. They could not then be satisfied with contests of honor and athletics for physical development; but they must introduce thousands of innocent animals into the arena and glut their lust by seeing them tear each other to pieces. And even this was not enough. Human beings, slaves were thrown into the arena to contend with and die by these wild beasts. How is it with us? When our fathers and sons were clearing the forest, breaking the prairie and opening up and improving new farms; and our mothers and daughters spinning, weaving, knitting and sewing there was little danger. The log rolling, the house-raising, the corn-husking, the apple-cutting and the quilting-bee were healthy, joyous, and useful